

Education is the cornerstone to building America's future. We must make a national commitment to education by strengthening our schools, fully funding special education, and modernizing our classrooms. At the same time, we must work to reduce class size, put in place the means for students to attain higher education, and make sure that we have the best trained, most qualified teachers in the world.

Specifically in Illinois, of approximately 120,000 Illinois seniors graduating this year, half do not meet Illinois reading, math or science standards. Even more alarmingly, three out of every four Illinois high school students from low-income families will graduate unable to meet state standards. Read more on the assessment of Illinois' educational system: ["Reflections on Standards, Assessment, Accountability and NCLB" by Glenn W. "Max" McGee, Ph.D.](#)

There are many educational programs and organizations dedicated to educational excellence. I strongly support many of them. But I am a firm believer in the need to set a framework within which all future educational programs must fit.

College Cost Reduction and Access Act

Because a college education is as important today as high school was a generation ago, the Democratic-led House passed landmark legislation to make college more accessible and affordable for all Americans. The [College Cost Reduction and Access Act](#) passed in 2007, will also ease the financial burdens college costs impose on students and families and expand college access for low-income and minority students.

College Opportunity and Affordability Act

Further on February 6, 2008, the House passed the [College Opportunity and Affordability Act](#), which will continue this Congress' effort to make college more affordable and accessible. This bill would reform our higher education system so that it operates in the best interests of students and families, while boosting our competitiveness and strengthening our future. The bill was signed into law on August 14, 2008.



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provides approximately \$100 billion for education, creating a historic opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of jobs, support states and school districts, and advance reforms and improvements that will create long-lasting results for our students and our nation including early learning, K-12, and post-secondary education. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan today announced that \$44 billion in stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) will be available to states by May. The first round of funding will help avert hundreds of thousands of estimated teacher layoffs in schools and school districts while driving crucial education improvements, reforms, and results for students.

[Read more on how the ARRA will change education.](#)